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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000892

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL
COMMERCE FOR ITA JEAN KELLY
TREASURY FOR OASIA JEFF NEIL
USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: GOB PRISONER RELEASES: LESS THAN MEETS THE EYE

REF: A. RANGOON 815

[1](#)B. RANGOON 535 AND PREVIOUS (NOTAL)

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: GOB claims of significant releases of political prisoners in 2004 are a bit misleading. While many have been freed this year, most are those who have been picked up and then quickly released without charge, or those who were arrested following last May's attack on ASSK's convoy but never charged. Aside from these "revolving door" releases, and despite continued international pressure, only 13 of the 1,300 long-term political prisoners in Burma have been freed this year -- a pace far slower than 2003's release rate. End summary.

Some Real Releases, Most are "Revolving Door"

[1](#)2. (C) According to opposition sources, the GOB recently released three long-term political prisoners before completion of their sentences. The three, U Thar Ban, Dr. Maung Maung Kyaw, and Ma Su, were sentenced to seven years imprisonment in 1998 for assisting in the compilation of a seven-volume history of the Burmese student movement. Student groups in Burma, especially the Rangoon University student union, have always been a font of anti-government activity. A fourth person, U Min Thu, also sentenced for this "crime" died in prison on June 12 after a long illness.

[1](#)3. (SBU) So far in 2004 there has been a relatively steady trickle of press reports or GOB press statements trumpeting releases of political prisoners. Of the 24 pro-democracy activists arrested so far this year for handing out pamphlets or other such offenses, 22 have been released. Only U Tin Myint (an NLD lawyer) and Ma Than Than Htay (an NLD organizer) have not been released and are likely to end up with long prison sentences for their alleged contacts with the Federation of Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB), an exile group in Thailand that has been branded a terrorist organization by the regime (ref A). The GOB also released around 50 NLD political prisoners who were arrested, but never charged, following the GOB ambush of Aung San Suu Kyi's (ASSK) convoy near Depeyin on May 30, 2003. These 50 were not part of the "official" NLD and UN list of 153 arrested at Depeyin -- all of whom have been subsequently released save ASSK and NLD Vice Chairman U Tin Oo (ref B).

[1](#)4. (C) The GOB is trying to take credit for releasing political prisoners by counting "revolving door" releases of those picked up recently but not charged, and those held without charge following a post-May 30 sweep. Looking only at long-term, non-Depeyin, prisoners, our count shows the GOB can only take credit so far this year for 13 releases. Most of those released had either served out their sentences or were very close to finishing them. In addition to U Thar Ban, Dr. Maung Maung Kyaw, and Ma Su, long-term political prisoners released to date in 2004 were:

- Myint Naing: sentenced to 25 years in 1991, later reduced to ten years. He served the full ten years.
- Tin Tun: a champion boxer sentenced in 1993 to 20 years.
- Soe Tun: a Rangoon Technical Institute student arrested [1](#)1996.
- Tin Aye: a lawyer sentenced in 1998 to seven years
- Wa-ben Soe: ill with cancer.
- Khin Cho Myint: served 10 years.
- Kyaw Kyaw: arrested 1999.
- Ne Oo Maung Maung: arrested 1999.
- Min Min Soe: arrested 1999.
- Myint Oo: arrested 1999.

Comment: A Slow Pace

[1](#)5. (C) Despite its propaganda, and defiant of continuous USG and UN pressure to release political prisoners, the GOB has freed only 13 of the more than 1,300 long-term political prisoners in 2004. This pace is far slower than 2003, when the GOB released more than 100 long-term political prisoners. It is reflective of the regime's regressive policies in general toward political opponents occurring, ironically, alongside the steady march down the GOB's much trumpeted

"Road Map to Democracy." End comment.
Martinez